

The Cavendish School

Warners End Road, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 3DW

Inspection dates 5–6 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement has not improved quickly enough over time, and is broadly average.
- The gap in attainment between students entitled to the pupil premium, disabled students and those with special educational needs and others in the school is still too wide, although steadily narrowing.
- Although there is some effective teaching, too much teaching requires improvement and a small proportion is inadequate.
- Teachers do not always match the work well enough to students' capabilities.
- Some students entitled to the pupil premium, as well as some disabled students and those with special educational needs, do not attend school as regularly as they should.
- The quality of teachers' marking and verbal feedback given in lessons does not always help students move up to the next level of attainment.
- There is currently not enough focus on reading across the school.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students do not achieve as well as they should. Students could contribute more to the school community.

The school has the following strengths

- Students' behaviour is good both in lessons and when moving round the school. They say they feel safe, and there are very few reported incidences of bullying.
- The choice of subjects and qualifications available to students is good and the extensive range of after-school clubs and activities promotes students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development well.
- The school's sport specialism makes a significant contribution to school life.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of how well students are performing because they track students' progress well.
- Senior leaders and the governing body have a clear vision for the future of the school, and are determined to raise standards. Their decisive actions are starting to show an impact, and senior leaders are highly regarded by staff because this is a school which continues to improve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors saw 32 parts of lessons taught by 31 teachers. Ten of these lessons were jointly observed with a member of the school’s senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors visited a number of lessons briefly, usually accompanied by senior members of staff or the special educational needs co-ordinator.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher, deputy and assistant headteachers, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and different groups of students. Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documentation, including self-evaluation documentation and improvement planning, records on the quality of teaching and students’ achievement, minutes of meetings and school policies. They also examined the school’s central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors observed teaching in Years 7 to 10, as Years 11, 12 and 13 were not in school.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents and carers, 82 of whom responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took account of the views of staff by considering 92 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Daniell, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Brian Netto

Additional Inspector

Jackie Easter

Additional Inspector

Stephen Palmer

Additional Inspector

Alan Radford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school and has a specialism in sport.
- The school operates specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs in the form of an onsite provision for one student who is visually impaired.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides funding for children in the care of the local authority and for students known to be eligible for free school meals, increased sharply in 2012 to be just above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students or who have special educational needs and are supported through school action is below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- A small proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups and very few speak English as an additional language.
- A small number of students make use of off-site provision, either on a full-time basis or as part of a day-release scheme. This provision includes local colleges where students study courses including in hairdressing, construction or vehicle maintenance. Some students who are at risk of permanent exclusion study full time at the Dacorum Education Support Centre.
- The sixth form is part of a local consortium involving three other schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum levels expected for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - ensuring that every teacher uses the information provided on students' current and potential achievement to plan work that is tailored closely to the capabilities of all students in the class
 - making sure that all teachers' marking indicates clearly to students how they can move up to the next level of attainment and improving the quality of some teachers' verbal feedback to students in lessons
 - sharing the existing good practice demonstrated by good and outstanding teachers in the school.
- Raise students' achievement across Key Stages 3, 4 and in the sixth form so that it is consistently above the national average by:
 - strengthening students' literacy skills across all subjects
 - encouraging all students to read more widely both in lessons and at home
 - reviewing the use of form time to ensure all students benefit from carefully targeted activities.
- Ensure that students entitled to the pupil premium, as well as disabled students and those who have special educational needs, attend school as regularly as the rest.
- Explore ways of encouraging more sixth form students to take on positions of responsibility so that they make a greater contribution to school life and raise their aspirations.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students have not achieved well in school over time. They join the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average, and they leave the school with results that are broadly in line with the national average.
- Current school data indicate an improving picture for 2013. Certainly, results in GCSE mathematics already gained, support this view, and school leaders forecast a sharp rise in attainment for those students gaining five or more good GCSE grades including in English and mathematics. Systems for forecasting results have been effective in the past.
- Most parents and carers believe that their children are making good progress. This has not been the case in the last few years. However, it is clear from information provided by the school and inspectors' observations of teaching that students' rates of progress are accelerating across the school.
- Students known to be eligible for the pupil premium achieve lower standards in English and mathematics compared to similar students nationally. In 2012, their results in GCSE English and mathematics were, on average, a grade lower than the rest of the year group. In 2012, of the 48 students eligible for the pupil premium, 44% made expected progress in English and 42% in mathematics.
- Current assessment information and other inspection evidence indicate that the gap between the attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals and that of other students is narrowing.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve less well than similar students nationally. Although they achieve less well than other students in school, this gap is also narrowing. No student in Year 11 had a statement of special educational needs in 2012.
- As a result of more effective leadership, gaps in attainment between different groups of students are narrowing. This is due to the school's drive in promoting equality of opportunity, fostering good relationships and tackling discrimination.
- The provision for students who are visually impaired is securing improved outcomes over time and they make expected progress.
- The small proportion of students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language achieve more highly than other students in the school, and often better than similar students nationally.
- School leaders have identified students' low levels of literacy as a barrier to achievement. Students who need intensive support for poor basic skills are currently taken out of modern foreign languages lessons and return to languages lessons, once they have made the required progress. However, in many lessons students are not always given the opportunity to develop their reading skills. Mathematical skills are being developed reasonably across a range of subjects.
- Students selected to read to inspectors were enthusiastic about reading. However, when inspectors observed teaching, opportunities were missed to encourage students to read.

- The school entered a large proportion of students in Year 11 early for GCSE mathematics in 2013. The higher-attaining students benefited from this decision, with all achieving or exceeding their challenging targets.
- Students who attend any alternative provision have had mixed success in the past. Their success at the Dacorum Education Support Centre has been compromised through poor attendance and not turning up to sit the examinations. Students attending college typically do better, and acquire useful work skills which set them up well for the future.
- Achievement in the sixth form is too inconsistent. The majority of students do not make good progress. In 2012, students made good progress in biology, drama and physical education at Advanced Level, but they underachieved in sociology.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although students experience some good and outstanding teaching, the proportion of teaching that requires improvement or that is inadequate, although decreasing, is too large.
- Teaching that requires improvement does not meet the capabilities of all students in the class. In these lessons, teachers do not always make full use of the detailed information available to them on individual student's targets for attainment. Consequently, high ability students are not sufficiently challenged, and lower ability students cannot always access the work.
- In a Year 9 science lesson based on the continental drift that required improvement, a significant amount of the lesson was taken up with students cutting out or sketching continents onto a piece of paper. This activity did not offer any challenge to the more-able students in the group, which meant that their rate of progress slowed.
- There are instances of good and better teaching. Some subject areas, including the school's specialist sport subject, provide teaching which offers a suitable degree of challenge and makes full use of information available on students' expected rates of progress. However, the quality of teaching remains variable and inconsistent, sometimes within the same subject area.
- Better teaching develops students' literacy and mathematical skills well. In humanities, students are taught to write in different styles, and in design and technology, use is made of both writing and mathematics when writing project plans. The quality of teaching observed for students in the 'skills group' was inconsistent. There are some missed opportunities in lessons for students to read more widely or to read aloud.
- The school's marking policy is often applied well, in that marking is regular and students are provided with helpful guidance as to how to improve their work. Where teachers' assessment is less helpful, marking is lacking in detail, and verbal feedback to students does not guide them sufficiently in lessons.
- Additional adults in the classroom, for example teaching assistants, work well with designated students to help them understand the work for themselves. Students in the special provision are given the support they need to make expected progress.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form has not secured good achievement over time. In a meeting with the lead inspector, students were positive about teaching in English, history and physical education. Teaching in the sixth form has started to develop students' independent

thinking and research skills, but this has yet to have a noticeable impact on their outcomes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students typically behave well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous to visitors and take pride in wearing their uniform. Their good behaviour in lessons is often brought about when teaching engages their interest. Only very rarely do they lose concentration, and this is usually when the work does not match their capabilities fully.
- The vast majority of parents and carers rightly believe that their children are kept safe when in school and that the school makes sure students are well behaved.
- Students told inspectors they feel safe in school and have noticed an improvement in behaviour. They attribute this to the headteacher's 'zero tolerance' approach to unacceptable behaviour, and to the fact that all teachers implement the classroom behaviour system consistently.
- Incidences of bullying are extremely rare. Students show a sensitive and well-informed understanding of different types of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying. They are well aware of the dangers associated with cyber bullying, and are confident that any bullying that was reported will be dealt with effectively.
- Fixed-term exclusions have been reduced through the effective use of the Internal Exclusion Room and the 'Hub' provision. Both these facilities cater well for the needs of students, and particularly for those with complex behavioural, social and emotional needs.
- Students' low attendance over the last three years has been a challenge for school leaders. It has now improved to be in line with the national average. However, some groups of students do not attend the school as regularly as the rest, including those eligible for the pupil premium and disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Attractive and up-to-date displays in classrooms and school corridors celebrate students' achievements and convey key messages effectively.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a range of activities in and outside of lessons. The arts subjects provide some good examples for students to be creative, and students deepen their awareness of other cultures well in humanities subjects.
- Students in the sixth form receive good quality guidance and support and effective use is made of learning mentors. Sixth form staff and learning mentors work hard to raise students' aspirations. However, sixth form students' leadership roles are currently under-developed and there is greater scope for them to give something back to the school.

The leadership and management are good

- Since taking up her post, the headteacher has successfully identified the barriers to progress and has taken decisive action to address the legacy of underperformance both within the staff and student body. Her astute decision making is now starting to have an impact on students' outcomes and other aspects of school life, for example the improved attendance and behaviour of students.

- The senior leadership team is well regarded by staff and works well together. Their capacity will be further enhanced by the approved addition of a second deputy headteacher, who has already been appointed, from September 2013. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school which is supported by a long-term development plan, as well as individual 100-day plans.
- The school's self-evaluation document rightly identifies what needs to be done to raise standards further. Systems for gathering and circulating information on students' progress are good.
- Senior leaders, managers and governors correctly focused on improving the quality of teaching and have set up rigorous monitoring procedures to ensure that weaker teachers are identified and supported to improve their practice. This is starting to have an impact, but remains work in progress. Opportunities are sometimes missed to share existing good practice. Inspectors usually agreed with leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching in lessons which were jointly observed.
- Subject leaders are active, and are supportive of the measures put in place by senior leaders to raise standards. They contribute towards leaders', managers, and governors' capacity to sustain improvement.
- The school offers a suitably wide range of subjects and qualifications. Students enjoy the wide range of clubs and other activities on offer during the school year. However, the use of form time in the mixed-year tutor groups is not yet maximised to meet all students' requirements.
- Leaders have set up systems to engage with parents and carers. Regular weekly newsletters aim to keep parents and carers up to date with what is happening in the school. Learning mentors work successfully with those parents who are more reluctant to work with the school, and the headteacher runs termly coffee mornings for parents and carers, as well as discussing key school issues at Parents' Focus Groups.
- Development plans show that the head of sixth form is due to become a member of the senior leadership team from September 2013. This will rightly raise the profile of the sixth form, and involve the head of sixth form in whole-school decision making.
- The local authority has targeted appropriate support since the appointment of the headteacher and has an accurate understanding of what the school has to do to become good in the future. Valuable support has been provided through the use of subject advisers in English, mathematics and science and this has reaped benefits, as demonstrated through 'banked' results in GCSE mathematics in 2013. The headteacher's continuing professional relationship with a National Leader in Education enables her to reflect on her own practice and to challenge and support her senior leaders effectively.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body have developed a better understanding of the school's current strengths and areas for development. They provide appropriate support for, and challenge to, the school's leaders and managers. Discussions with governors during the inspection demonstrated an improved awareness of how well different groups of students achieve compared to others. They know how the pupil-premium funding is being spent. However, they were unable to provide much detail on the impact the pupil premium is having on targeted students. They receive regular reports from senior leaders and are attached to faculties, which allows them to monitor, evaluate and review the work of subject leaders. They also receive regular reports on the quality of teaching and the management of teachers' performance, which informs decisions as to whether or not they progress up the pay scale. Governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are in place, and that statutory requirements are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117528
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	401671

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1122
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	157
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Taylor
Headteacher	Susan Forde
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2009
Telephone number	01442 404333
Fax number	01442 404378
Email address	admin@cavendish.herts.sch.uk

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